

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 3, 2006

The Honorable Michael Leavitt
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Leavitt:

We are writing to follow up on our letter of October 25, 2005, and to urge you to retain all of the Lung Specialized Programs of Research Excellence (SPOREs) at the National Cancer Institute (NCI). We understand the National Cancer Advisory Board will be meeting next week to evaluate three Lung SPOREs for renewed funding and another three sites for new funding.

Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer death in both men and women in the United States. In fact, lung cancer causes more deaths than colon, breast, and prostate cancer combined. During the period from 1974-2000, the five-year survival rate for lung cancer has increased only 2%--from 13% to its current rate of 15%. In comparison, over the same period, the five-year survival rate for breast cancer increased from 75% to 88%, for colon cancer from 50% to 63%, and for prostate cancer from 67% to 99%. Despite these devastating statistics, there are only six Lung SPOREs out of a total of 58 SPOREs nationwide.

The SPORE program is unique and important. Its mandate is "to conduct research that will have the most immediate impact possible on reducing incidence and mortality of human cancer" The SPORES have made many important advances in the diagnosis and treatment of cancer, including the development of new diagnostic tools and effective treatment protocols. As a result of these advances, we have seen an increase in the five year survival rate for many cancers as well as a reduction in the pain and suffering from cancer. SPOREs have also been responsible for the development of 210 clinical interventions in the past 14 years.

The National Cancer Institute (NCI) has proposed changes to the SPORE program that could greatly impede NCI's Challenge Goal to the Nation – to eliminate the suffering and death due to cancer by 2015. These changes include: the reduction of guaranteed research funding from five years to three years; the elimination of bridge funding available to participants at the end of their grant tenure; the prohibition against grant reapplication within two years of a grant denial; and, the potential for a reduction in the overall number of SPOREs

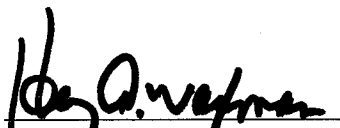
In the long term, these changes will adversely affect each of the 58 SPOREs and their research efforts. However, three Lung SPOREs, the University of California at Los Angeles Lung Cancer Research Program, the University of Pittsburgh Cancer Institute, and the Vanderbilt Ingram Cancer Center face immediate risk of not having their Lung SPORE grant renewed. If these grants are not renewed, their research programs will be in jeopardy, resulting in the loss of research and the critical knowledge necessary for the development of effective diagnostics and treatments for lung cancer.

These three institutions represent 50% of the Lung SPORE program and collectively have been responsible for many important clinical interventions. Losing them would be a serious setback in the fight against lung cancer—a disease that comprises 30% of all cancer deaths. Lung cancer research already suffers from insufficient funding support and this added loss would have a devastating effect on the lives of every current and future lung cancer patient.

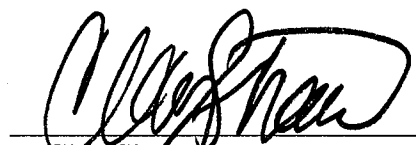
Now is not the time to make a wholesale change in a program which has already proven to have had an immediate and tangible impact on improving the lives of cancer patients without a careful and deliberative review.

We encourage the NCI to review the SPORE program's unique and critical role in cancer research and to renew its commitment to this vital program.

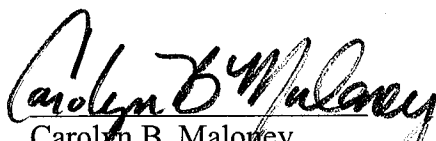
Sincerely,




Henry A. Waxman
Member of Congress



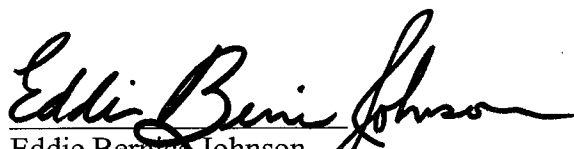
E. Clay Shaw, Jr.
Member of Congress



Carolyn B. Maloney
Member of Congress



John Abney Culberson
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Eddie Bernice Johnson
Member of Congress



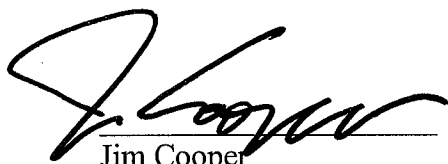
Elijah E. Cummings
Member of Congress



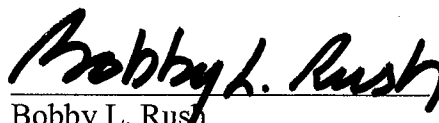
Jim Davis
Member of Congress



Sheila Jackson-Lee
Member of Congress



Jim Cooper
Member of Congress



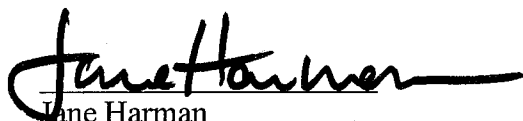
Bobby L. Rush
Member of Congress



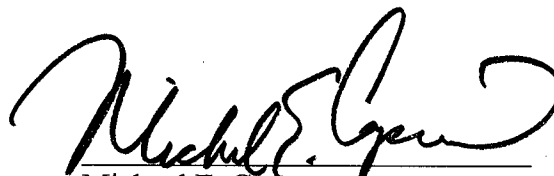
Michael F. Doyle
Member of Congress



Lois Capps
Member of Congress



Jane Harman
Member of Congress



Michael E. Capuano
Member of Congress

Cc: Elias A. Zerhouni, M.D., Director National Institutes of Health
Andrew C. Von Eschenbach, M.D., Director National Cancer Institute